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SUBJECT: Public Diplomacy in Kuwait -- What "Moves the Needle"?

Ref A: Kuwait 1201

Ref B: 04 Kuwait 2828

Ref C: 04 Kuwait 2797

Introduction

11. In the report "Changing Minds and Winning Peace" by the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World," the authors emphasize the need for our public diplomacy programs to be evaluated by their ability to change attitudes towards the United States, using the metaphorical measure of "moving the needle" in positively influencing Muslim audiences. This cable examines our PD efforts in Kuwait in that context and offers some suggestions on what approaches and programs work best and where more resources could usefully be applied.

Kuwait a Special Case, for Now

12. In some ways Kuwait is a special case. Due to the role of the United States in Kuwait's survival and the removal of Saddam Hussein from power, Kuwaitis are perhaps the most pro-American of any national group in the Middle East or the world. Kuwaitis are very receptive to our messages. We have extremely easy access to local media. Kuwaitis are eager for more contact with Americans, with whom they feel a kinship based not only on recent history, but also on a perception of the American character as sincere and open. On the other hand, the current generation of high school-age Kuwaitis was not personally scarred by the Iraqi occupation and we cannot count on them to have the same emotional ties to the U.S. as their parents. In addition, Kuwaitis feel less welcome to the United States since 9/11, both in terms of visa difficulties and the fear of a poor reception should they go to the U.S. Thus more and more are choosing not to travel or study in the U.S. They travel to Spain or Lebanon and they send their children to study in local universities (some with U.S. affiliations) or to the UK, Canada, or Australia. Thus we have no reason to believe that our highly favorable public diplomacy positioning now will be automatically replicated in the future. So what works?

13. Key Findings

A) There is no substitute for visits by senior USG officials. The act of visiting a key ally is an extremely important element of public diplomacy in itself. We urge almost every visiting official to talk to the local press. We have very good ability to design and place interviews. On the negative side, it does not go unnoticed when a senior official fails to engage with the local press.

B) "Real live Americans" from a variety of fields are easy to program in Kuwait and have substantial impact. Independent experts on U.S. foreign policy are welcome, and there is a constant demand for other speakers in specialized fields. Current budgets permit one programmed American speaker a year. It's simply not enough to have a sustained impact.

C) American Corners are great venues. Over the last year, we have opened corners at Kuwait University and at the American University of Kuwait. These small investments provide a continuing window into American subjects and can serve as the seeds of American studies programs. The corners are also excellent venues for speakers. Recently we have effectively used Embassy staff members to speak on a variety of issues, from visa rules to the history of the blues.

D) There is a continuing demand for exposure to American life. Media contacts often ask us for more Washington File Arabic translations of cultural, scientific and social stories. Especially welcome are stories with an Islamic angle, such as a recent story about a Saudi-American woman candidate for local office in the U.S. "Hi" magazine has a strong readership in Kuwait and is recognized as effective even by some U.S. critics here. The magazine serves as a valuable resource to Arabs who lack a nuanced understanding of American life, and who are constantly exposed to violent American films and racy music videos.

E) Radio Sawa and Al-Hurra television are gaining ground in Kuwait. The channels record higher ratings in Kuwait than in most

other Arab states. The "Changing Minds and Winning Peace" report questions whether Sawa's popular music/"news lite" content "moves the needle" of public opinion. We assess that both Sawa and Al-Hurra are growing in effectiveness, and they merit continued strong support. A more news-intensive Arabic language VOA is not available to Kuwaiti listeners. This could be a useful supplement to Sawa.

F) English language programs open doors. Even anti-American audiences suspicious of U.S. Embassy activities realize the benefits of English-language instruction. The ACCESS microscholarship program, which offers six-month after-school English classes for about 100 Kuwaiti non-elite ninth- and tenth-grade students, is in its second year and has been a resounding success. The benefits are two-fold: First, the Kuwaiti students are exposed to the English language and American culture in a positive setting and second, we believe Kuwaitis exposed to English-language instruction in this setting at this age are more likely to pursue university education in the U.S., a crucial post goal and a valuable tool in creating future leaders who view the U.S. favorably (see ref A). We recommend doubling the ACCESS program. The instruction should be doubled from one six-month semester to two, and funding should be provided to offer substantially more classes. Post also recommends funding for additional after-school English language programs.

G) English-language instruction, while vital, is not enough to reach the youth audience. As post works to expand educational opportunities in-country for large numbers of non-elite Kuwaitis, so too must exchange opportunities expand. Post pioneered in summer 2004 the ChevronTexaco Summer Camp (so named because we approached private sponsors for funding), in which 10 conservative, non-elite Kuwaiti boys, aged 12-16, traveled to an international English-language camp in Florida. The program served to introduce these conservative young people to other cultures and religions, giving them a new view of the world that countered extremist misinformation and hostility. The program also created an enormously positive psychological impression of the U.S. and American society both in the participants themselves, and within their broader family and tribal structure. We strongly recommend increased funding for such exchange programs.

H) Exchange programs such as the YES program to send high school age students to the U.S. for one year are having a very positive impact. Post sent six Kuwaitis in 2003, 12 in 2004, and will send 12 in 2005. In discussions with program alumni, they express a desire to return to the U.S. for higher education and indicate that they have become teachers of Kuwaitis, explaining the U.S. and describing their overwhelmingly positive experiences to family, friends and colleagues. The YES program needs to be expanded.

I) We have had less success in Kuwait with the PLUS (Partnerships for Learning Undergraduate Studies) program. Three Kuwaitis who were accepted for FY2005 dropped out, saying that stipends were too low and too many restrictions were placed on them (prohibition on driving, little choice in schools/locations). We don't know if these problems are specific to Kuwaitis, but we offer them to those who are charged with managing and evaluating the program.

J) For reaching young professionals, the most effective PD tool is the International Visitor Leadership (IV) Program. Without exception, all post participants, including journalists, officials, and youth leaders, return with a more favorable view of the United States and American society and values. IV alumni share their experiences with friends and family, and professional methods and training gained in the U.S. are spread to professional colleagues. More funding for additional programs, particularly those aimed at conservative segments of society with unrealistic impressions of the U.S., such as Islamic clerics and preachers and religion teachers in secondary schools would have a great impact on increased Kuwaiti understanding of American society, values, and policy. Embassy Riyadh's pioneering program demonstrated the multiplier effect gained from sending such individuals to the U.S. for study visits.

K) In a separate message (ref A), post described its efforts to break out of the deep slump in the flow of Kuwaiti students to U.S. universities since 9/11. Progress on this strategic goal is slow. Post believes that the USG and U.S. academic institutions are going to need to do much more to gain back and retain market share in a more and more competitive higher education market. Continuing to improve visa and immigration procedures is critical, but more attention needs to be given to systems in U.S. universities not only to track the presence of foreign students (SEVIS), but also to make sure the experience is a full and positive exposure to U.S. life and culture. American institutions also need to spend more time in the region recruiting. We can facilitate, but we can't replicate the face-to-face contact with prospective students and their parents.

L) U.S. universities abroad are a good idea but they are not the same and not enough. Such institutions are proliferating in Kuwait and other locations in the Gulf. While they do bring positive aspects of the U.S. university experience to the region, e.g., high standards, more dialogue, greater freedom of inquiry,

they are not an adequate substitute for a sustained period of exposure to the United States. We need to work with these institutions to promote summer studies in the U.S., junior years abroad in the U.S., and graduate studies in the U.S.

Resource Implications

The most important and effective instruments in our current public diplomacy toolkit are training and exchange programs, particularly those focused on younger audiences. These are labor-intensive programs both at post and in the U.S. Careful selection and preparation of participants is critical to program success. PD staff at Embassy Kuwait and its partners, such as AMIDEAST, are stretched very thinly across our programming goals. They are also heavily involved in ambitious expansion of Middle East Partnership programming. The notion of "doing more with less" will produce inferior results and does a disservice to the importance of the task. We need at least one additional PD American position at post to keep up with our own objectives. The additional officer would have primary responsibility for educational exchanges and English language instruction. Post PD budget should be increased to allow up to six American speakers per year, double the number of American corners from 2 to 4, expand the number of IV recipients, and provide opportunities for local university students to spend a summer or junior year in the U.S.

LEBARON